



News Release

For Immediate Release:
Tuesday, April 26, 2005

Utah's Record Water Year Has the Potential to Increase Mosquito Habitat Statewide

Public Health Officials Remind Utahns About West Nile Virus Prevention

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Utah's water drought woes may be over this year but the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is concerned that the increase in moisture could create additional habitat for mosquitoes. Combined with the right biological and climate factors, the extra moisture could lead to an increased risk for West Nile virus (WNV) infection.

The peak time for water runoff is in May and June and Utah's water managers expect high runoff levels. During these months, mosquitoes begin pestering humans and wildlife. With the potential for more standing water for breeding, Utah could have more mosquitoes to contend with this summer. The long-term mosquito forecast cannot be predicted as that will be based on ongoing rain and the temperatures. Currently, the state is at a "low" risk level for WNV, which means that the mosquito season is beginning and there has been no viral detection in 2005. The risk level will be adjusted throughout the season and may vary throughout the state.

Preparations for bird, mosquito and sentinel chicken testing will be widespread throughout the state by May 23, 2005. Local mosquito abatement districts are already trapping mosquitoes in southern Utah as the temperatures are warmer there than in other areas of the state.

The UDOH and the local health departments will notify the public through the media when detection of WNV occurs. This information will also be posted on the UDOH website each Wednesday (through October) by 1 p.m. at www.health.utah.gov/wnv.

Utahns can take measures now and throughout the summer to help prevent the spread of WNV by finding and getting rid of standing water. Suggestions for reducing mosquitoes include turning over or removing containers in yards where water collects, cleaning out birdbaths and wading pools at least once a week, cleaning clogged rain gutters and downspouts, and repairing door and window screens if torn.

– MORE –

Page 2 of 2 - Utah's Record Water Year Has the Potential to Increase Mosquito Habitat

While the 2004 WNV season was relatively mild, it's difficult to predict mosquito and virus activity. In 2004, WNV was detected along the densely populated Wasatch Front for the first time. (See attached 2004 WNV Season Summary.) In neighboring states with similar climate and geography, the second year of WNV activity has often been more severe, signaling a potential increase in WNV in parts of the state this season.

The UDOH and Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), along with local health departments, local mosquito abatement districts, and the Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) are working together to monitor WNV in Utah. WNV activity will be actively monitored throughout 2005 as follows:

- State and local health departments will track possible human infections throughout Utah.
- The UDOH Utah Public Health Laboratory will test mosquito, bird and human samples.
- The UDAF will test for the virus in horses and chickens.
- The Utah Mosquito Abatement Association has placed sentinel chickens throughout the state, which help to monitor for WNV.
- Mosquito abatement will monitor mosquito numbers and the mosquitoes will be trapped and tested for viral detection. Some districts are now actively trapping mosquitoes.
- The DWR will respond to public reports of dead birds.

In addition to reducing mosquitoes around the house, public health officials urge Utahns to Fight the Bite by using repellents with DEET and wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts when outdoor in the evening and early morning. (See attached WNV Prevention Facts.)

Efforts taken in 2004 to inform the public about West Nile virus will continue this year. Activities include the Fight the Bite media campaign, retailer promotions for purchase of DEET products, billboards, posters, fliers, presentations, and media notification.

For more information, call your local health department or the UDOH Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542 or visit www.health.utah.gov/wnv.

#

The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.